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FS-583 September 1995

THE NORTH AMERICAN FORESTRY COMMISSION OF THE FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS

United States Department Agriculture
Forest Service

Natural Resources Canada
Canadian Forest Service
Ressources naturelles Canada
Service canadien des forêts

Secretaría de Medio Ambiente, Recursos Naturales y Pesca
Secretaría de Agricultura, Ganadería y Desarrollo Rural

A North American Mission

The North American Forestry Commission (NAFC) is one of six regional forestry commissions of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). The others cover the regions of Africa, Asia-Pacific, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, and the Near East. NAFC, established in 1959 as a statutory body of FAO, provides a policy and technical forum for Canada, Mexico, and the United States to discuss and address forest issues on a North American basis. Drawing on regional experiences, it also provides advice to the FAO on its formulation of policy and on priorities for the FAO's forestry program. The mandate of NAFC, as with other FAO forestry commissions, is to advise on the formulation of forest policy and to review and coordinate its implementation at the regional level; to exchange information and, generally through special subsidiary bodies, advise on suitable practices and action with regard to technical problems, and to make appropriate recommendations in relation to the foregoing. (FAO Conference Resolution No. 27/59, Article VI of the Constitution)

In this regard, NAFC supports research and natural resource management activities through study groups that explore issues of concern to the three countries. Since together Canada, Mexico, and the United States contain a mix of boreal, temperate, and tropical ecosystems, the results of NAFC's work can be applied more broadly to assist other countries and regions facing similar conditions.

Sessions of NAFC

NAFC brings together the Canadian, Mexican, and United States heads of forest service and other senior forest officials from those countries, FAO, and observers from nongovernmental organizations every 2 years to address forestry and natural resource matters, to advance scientific knowledge, to promote cooperation, and to facilitate the exchange of information. The biennial sessions of NAFC are held in each country in rotation. At the 17th and most recent session in Jasper (Alberta), Canada, the state of forestry in the region was reviewed through national progress reports. Technical papers were also presented and discussed, on the effects of the North American Free Trade Agreement on wood products industries; the coordination of strategies to provide ecological reserves to preserve biodiversity on a continental scale; and criteria and indicators of sustainable forest management.

Committee of Alternates

A feature of NAFC is the Committee of Alternates (COA), comprised of senior forest service members from Canada, Mexico, and the United States. COA reports to NAFC and advises it on current activities and future direction. COA meets on a regular basis to guide and oversee the work of the study groups; evaluate progress of projects; commission analytical papers on emerging issues; and identify opportunities to advance cooperative objectives. Another key function of COA is to distribute information to its extensive network.

NAFC Groups in Action

NAFC supports applied research, natural resource management activities, and technical cooperation through these chartered study groups:

- Fire Management
- Insects and Disease
- Atmospheric Change & Forests
- Silviculture
- Forest Genetic Resources
- Neotropical Migratory Species
- Forest Products (in formation)
- Multilingual Vocabulary

The **Fire Management** study group uses wildland prescribed burns and fire effects studies to increase management effectiveness. Current activities include research on landscape scale fire ecology; implementation of border agreements for fire management; and delivery of a fuels management course to train forest and land managers. Mexican fire managers have also worked on the Sequoia National Forest in California to improve their use of fire management technologies.

The **Insect and Disease** study group, one of the original groups, continues activities that protect tree and forest health in North America. Recent accomplishments include joint meetings with the Atmospheric Change and Forests study group to enhance understanding of the interaction between biotic and abiotic maladies; technical exchanges on white pine blister rust; the identification of causal agents and factors of oak wilt; risk assessment surveys to determine the threat to forests by exotic species; and trials of pesticides in Christmas tree plantations. The group has recently published a textbook entitled *Insects of Mexico* and is working on a new publication, *Diversity of Mistletoes of Mexico*.

The **Atmospheric Change and Forests** study group has published the *North American Forest Health Report* to promote forest health assessments in forest and land management. The group is currently conducting studies to monitor pollution at the Desierto de los Leones National Park near Mexico City.

The **Silviculture** study group has compiled and currently maintains a directory of tropical silviculture experts. The group is producing a series of 20 monographs titled *Useful Trees of Tropical North America* (13 published, 4 ready for press, and 3 in progress); conducted an environmental impact assessment of forestry development in tropical Mexico; and has hosted workshops and symposia, the most recent being the "Environmental Impacts of Forest Development in Tropical Mexico," in Quintana Roo, November 1992.

The **Forest Genetic Resources** study group encourages conservation on North American forest genetic resources by promoting cooperation among member countries, coordinating multinational research programs, and facilitating the exchange of information. Members have secured grants to fund studies of Mexican and U.S. spruces, pinyon pines, closed-cone pines, and western white pines. The group encouraged the establishment of the Mexican Centro de Genetica Forestal, began the "World Directory of Forest Geneticists and Tree Breeders," and has published a Spanish-English glossary of terms for forest genetics and tree improvement. A workshop on Temperate North American Forest Genetic Resources was held in June 1995, with participants from North America and those countries around the world that use North American genetic resources. The workshop provides input to the FAO's International Conference and Programme for Plant Genetic Resources.

Established in 1993, the **Neotropical Migratory Species** study group focuses on the identification of critical migratory species habitat conditions, and the status of migratory species, including birds, bats, and butterflies. The group is working on a pamphlet describing migratory species of North America and their conservation status. It is also compiling a data base on neotropical migratory birds that will include information on species status and breeding and wintering habitats. Such data will enable the group to identify critical habitat areas throughout North America for migratory species.

The **Forest Products** study group, newly formed in 1994, is in the process of developing its mandate, objectives, and activities. It is expected that the group will consider how to make maximum use of the range of forest products, including nonwood materials and forest services to better respond to the multiple demands placed on the resource base.

The **Multilingual Vocabulary** study group has nearly completed a 12,000+ vocabulary of forest terminology in electronic form. Users will be able to conduct searches, and generate subject subsections and trilingual word lists in English, French, and Spanish. The vocabulary will be distributed to natural resource managers in all three countries. The group will then be dissolved, having fulfilled its mandate.

Likewise, throughout the history of NAFC, several study groups have operated that have been disbanded at the completion of their task. Such is the case, for example, of the Forest Engineering study group. Another study group on Light Frame Structure completed their task by announcing the publication of a Spanish language woodframe construction manual, *Manual de Construcción de Estructuras Ligeras de Madera*, at the 1994 meeting of NAFC.

Future Direction

Built on a 30-year legacy of dedicated technical exchange and research, NAFC will continue to maintain a high caliber of research, fostering interdisciplinary work among study groups, testing innovative sustainable forest management techniques, and entering into a more active dialogue with the FAO, other regional forestry commissions, and interested organizations. The range of ecosystems represented provides a unique opportunity for international cooperation with other countries and regions. NAFC will also seek a broader role within the forestry communities of the region to better link science with policy for effective conservation, management, and sustainable development of forests in North America.

Natural resource issues are varied and the solutions are complex. While some are unique to North America, many have broader dimensions. The history of close cooperation among the members of NAFC has facilitated the development of common approaches to common challenges. Continuing collaboration will ensure future progress as NAFC moves into the next century.